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SUBJECT: SECRETARY CHERTOFF'S MEETINGS WITH SENIOR GOS
LEADERS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During Secretary Michael Chertoff's March 29 meetings with senior GOS officials, he stressed the need for closer law enforcement cooperation and a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT). The Secretary noted that Singapore and the United States had similar approaches to balance the need for security with ensuring the efficient movement of people and goods. More information sharing would improve our understanding of the threats we faced. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong stressed the importance of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia to keep other countries committed to fight terrorism. Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong argued that only moderate Muslims could win the long-term fight against radical Islam. The Secretary discussed our success against the leadership of al-Qa'ida, but noted that other terrorist groups were capable of launching more smaller-scale attacks. The Secretary told the GOS leaders that the President was resolute that we would achieve a successful outcome in Iraq. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff visited Singapore from March 28-30. Accompanied by the Ambassador, he met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, and Deputy Prime Minister S. Jayakumar on March 29. Adam Isles, Counselor to the Secretary, Paul Fujimura, DHS Director for Asia/Pacific, and

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poloff (notetaker) also attended the meetings. Secretary Chertoff's meetings with Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Wong Kan Seng are reported septel.

Law Enforcement Cooperation

¶3. (SBU) In his meetings with the senior GOS leadership, the Secretary stressed the need for closer law enforcement

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cooperation and noted that a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) would enable us to use information provided by Singapore in court proceedings. PM Lee said Singapore wanted to conclude an MLAT as well as a Double Taxation Agreement. DPM Jayakumar was similarly positive, but noted Singapore did not want an MLAT with the United States to set a precedent for its neighbors in the region who might use an MLAT to

engage in "fishing expeditions." The Secretary said we were interested in more tangible information sharing, such as terrorist look-out information.

14. (SBU) At the same time, we wanted to enhance our anti-money laundering cooperation, which would become even more significant with Singapore's decision to license casinos. It would be mutually beneficial to pool our knowledge of suspicious transactions, the Secretary added. DPM Jayakumar said Singapore worked closely with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and would be introducing legislation next month to tighten its money laundering controls. When DPM Jayakumar asked about concerns with Singapore's regulations, the Ambassador noted the strict bank secrecy laws and said it was important for Singapore to adopt a declaration system for cash couriers.

Risk Management

15. (U) The Secretary noted that Singapore and the United States had similar approaches to balancing security with the efficient movement of people and goods. Information and technology were important to improve our ability to screen what "we have to worry about." Information sharing with our partners was also essential to understand the threats better. The Secretary told PM Lee that a main focus of his trip to Asia was container and port security. PM Lee said Singapore had a vested interest in high standards for container security. Asked if other countries in the region were cooperating, the Secretary said that cooperation was good and we were seeking ways to give shippers incentives to collect more information, which would improve our ability to focus our screening more effectively.

Radical Islam and the Terrorist Threat

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16. (SBU) Singapore wanted the United States to stay involved in Southeast Asia, stressed PM Lee. It was the only country with the strength and staying power to get other countries to keep up the fight against terrorism. Singapore does not hesitate to encourage the United States on CT because "it's in our own self-interest," said PM Lee.

17. (SBU) In the long term, the battle against radical Islam could be won only by moderate Muslims, argued SM Goh. Religious leaders had to be encouraged to teach the correct interpretation of the Koran. In Indonesia, Jemaah Islamiya leader Abu Bakir Bashir indoctrinated many people who became terrorists. We "must neuter these people." In the Middle East, the democracy message was not well received, advised SM Goh, since many of the region's leaders were not democratic. It would be more effective to focus on economic development and education. The Secretary responded that it was not easy to implement democratic government, but democracy combined with the rule of law helped create barriers to terrorism. SM Goh urged the United States to reach out more to moderate Muslims in the Middle East. The Secretary noted that the Rice-Chertoff Initiative was an important element in our effort to do that, in part by welcoming more students from the Middle East to come to the United States.

18. (SBU) We have inflicted significant damage to the top leadership of al-Qa'ida, but haven't completely eliminated their operational abilities, noted the Secretary. Groups affiliated or sympathetic to al-Qa'ida were also emerging. The ability of al-Qa'ida and other groups to launch large scale attacks has diminished, but we could see the multiplication of smaller scale attacks, which posed a new set of challenges, the Secretary observed. The USG was concerned about the radicalization of Islam and the emergence of "clear skin" terrorists who had no prior links to terrorist organizations. This was more of a problem in

Europe than the United States, but would require a change in our security practices, which were geared more toward known terrorists.

After an Attack

¶9. (SBU) In the case of SARS or the terrorist threat, it was important to tell the public the bad news beforehand and even "exaggerate a bit" to prepare them for the worst, stated PM Lee. Then, the government could focus the public's attention on how to deal with the problem. In London, the initial response by the authorities to the bombings last July was very good, but racial tensions did emerge. The Prime Minister said he was worried about the impact a terrorist attack would have on Singapore's multi-racial and multi-religious society and its 15 percent Muslim minority. The GOS was encouraging the development of a network of community leaders who could mitigate any religious or racial strife and mistrust that would occur.

Iraq

¶10. (SBU) The GOS leaders expressed their support for U.S. efforts in Iraq. The Secretary said the President was resolute that we would achieve a successful outcome: a stable and secure Iraq. The majority of people in Iraq wanted a democratic and peaceful society despite the violent attacks by a minority. If we fail, it would embolden terrorists.

Regional Developments

¶11. (SBU) Turning to the terrorist threat in Southeast Asia, DPM Jayakumar said Singapore was confident of Malaysia's ability to control the problem. Indonesia had been in denial mode for several years, but was now moving in the right direction. The GOI was politically committed to doing more on CT, but madrassas were still "churning out more cohorts" of terrorists. The GOS attributed the violence in southern Thailand to local grievances against Bangkok. It was not a jihadist problem, but if the situation continued to

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deteriorate, it could attract foreign elements, warned DPM Jayakumar. The Philippines government was not strong and the leadership was too wrapped up in its own problems to focus on the terrorist threat.

¶12. (SBU) In Indonesia and Malaysia, a long-term trend toward an Islamic state existed, warned SM Goh. Both societies were becoming more religious and conservative. Another worrying development was the injection of religion into the political debate during the last general election in Malaysia. Asked if religious radicals could intimidate the governments of Singapore's neighbors, SM Goh said they would not succeed. The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) was a secular force that would not allow that and the Malaysian government was alert to the activity of radicals.

¶13. (U) The Secretary's party has cleared this message.
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